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ABSTRACT

This document addresses some of the misconceptions about counseling, including confusions about the distinctions between the various kinds of counseling available and the role and place of counseling in higher education. It notes that the term counseling is often tacked on to the personal tutor in higher education as an extra job that he/she should do in addition to teaching duties. Distinctions are made between the terms "generic counseling" and "psychological counseling," and it is suggested that the type of counseling practiced by tutors when dealing with personal problems is more likely to be generic counseling than psychological counseling. Various aspects of generic counseling are discussed and some of the definitions of counseling which describe psychological counseling are considered. Views on the role of a counselor held by senior management personnel, tutors, students, and counselors themselves are given. It is concluded that counseling is a frequently used and misused term, that there are many different forms of counseling stemming from different schools of thought, and that one of the major misconceptions appears to be the confusion between generic counseling and psychological counseling. (NB)

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The meaning of counselling

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THE MEANING OF COUNSELLING

The misconceptions about counselling are many. Even the word "Counsellor" has little precise meaning. Historically, the word has changed its meaning but has come increasingly to signify anyone who calls himself Counsellor and who wants to be helpful, essentially through discussions of a one to one nature, but the formal title "Counsellor" does imply more concern, less intent to direct or manipulate, and perhaps more important, it implies a certain psychological sophistication.

In a functional sense the confusion about counselling falls into two main categories (according to Palmer - see Warneth 1973):

1. confusions about the distinctions between the various kinds of counselling available, and;

2. confusions as to the role and place of counselling in Higher Education and its contribution to education.

It is difficult to sort out these confusions and unfortunately students, as one might expect, are unable to distinguish between the kinds of counselling that are available to them.

Before attempting to define the various kinds of counselling, it is important to draw a distinction between "advice" and "counselling".

Definitions of counselling given in the majority of dictionaries stress "advice".

Counsel - (n); consultation, deliberation, advice or plan.
Counselling - (a service consisting of); giving advice on miscellaneous problems, purpose or confidential matters, to e.g.citizens, children in school; one who keeps counsel - a barrister.

It is useful to make explicit the connotations of the "counsel" as distinguished from "advice". Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms (1968) states:

"Counsel often stresses the fruit of wisdom or deliberation and presupposes weightier occasions than advice or more authority or a closer personal relationship in the one who counsels. The noun sometimes suggests instruction or advice or a lofty or ideal character ... wisdom - deliberation - weightier occasions - more authority - a closer personal relationship in the one who counsels (this might infer a quality of concern)".

According to Warneth (1973) there are two major kinds of counselling. One is Generic counselling and the other is Psychological counselling.

Generic counselling covers a wide range of subjects and resources that include wisdom, deliberation and decision-making processes, whereas psychological counselling is held to be a skill of a specific kind and is practised by "trained" counsellors in education.

Whilst generic counselling covers legal counsel, financial counsel and career counsel, psychological counselling aims at working in depth, in a close, non-judgemental relationship with a client in order to enable a voluntary change of behaviour or for a greater inner awareness of self to take place, designed to produce a sense of well-being and inner strength.

There is, however, considerable confusion between generic and psychological counselling and:

"Until counselling can be freed from the obscuring and distorting effects of this association, it cannot be restored to its simple, central and crucial function to which everyone must have access. This access is critical today when so much burden is placed on the individual in the forging of his own identity and of his existence. Generic counselling should be of ready and simple access to everyone - to Vice Chancellor, Principal or Student - when they need it and for whatever support, small or large, businesslike or profoundly personal". (Palmer - see Warneth, 1973).

In my research I aimed to clarify these misconceptions in counselling and the confusion that appears to arise between generic counselling and psychological counselling. It was particularly evident to me over many years of working in FE and HE that Principals, Tutors and other educationalists tended to use the word "counselling" in a way that indicated "advice giving" and not in a way that indicated psychological counselling.

It would, therefore, appear that counselling means different things to different people. As Halmos (1968) has demonstrated, counselling is done by many professions, lawyers, medical personnel, social workers and teachers, in a wide range of settings from courts to classrooms.

The difficulties found in educational establishments with regard to the meaning of counselling appear to be that, the word "counselling" has been tacked on to the personal tutor as an extra job that he/she should perform in addition to their teaching duties. In many cases it appears that whilst tutors refer to an aspect of their work as "counselling" it does seem to imply that the sort of counselling offered is, in fact, just the same 'advice giving' that has been operating in educational establishments for years.

This view was emphasised in a leading article in the Times Educational Supplement (1978) entitled "Misty Counselling". It implied that counselling meant merely an administrative role of a teacher's duty:

"Much of the counselling done within the Open University by their Counsellors is merely administrative and part of a teacher's normal role".

This would also seem to be true for tutors practising counselling in Further and Higher Education.

Tutors indicated that they were highly involved in academic counselling (when figures were analysed, the types of problems emerging with greater frequency were, in fact, "vocational guidance" and "completion of academic forms".

Although it may appear that this is an area where information and advice only is needed, Milner (1974) states that "Vocational guidance cannot be effective if it does not encompass the personal and educational aspects of a person's life; it is as much concerned with personality variables as it is with counselling for personal problems".

Gill (1967) also had the same view as Milner since he suggests that educational counselling needs to be more than the giving of advice. He defines counselling as "helping people to understand themselves with reference to personal, educational and vocational aspects of their lives and in the light of what they understand about themselves to make decisions".

It is important to realise that personal counselling is not necessarily psychological counselling. In fact the type of counselling practised by tutors when dealing with personal problems is more likely to fall into the category of generic counselling, that is to say offering wisdom, deliberation, advice and decision-making processes. It would be very unusual to find a tutor who would offer a form of psychological counselling in order to help a student deal with a personal problem (see previous definition of psychological counselling) unless the tutor had received some form of training in counselling techniques and skills. It can be seen later that very few tutors had received any form of training in counselling skills. Tutors commonly see counselling as meaning "giving advice", in direct contrast to Patterson (1967) who states that counselling "is not the giving of advice". Perhaps the true nature of counselling is revealed by Patterson's (negative) approach of explaining what does not constitute counselling.

By exclusion many of the misconceptions surrounding counselling can be identified.

Counselling:

1. is not the giving of information, though information may be giving in counselling;

2. is not the giving of advice, suggestions and recommendations (advice should be recognised as such and not camouflaged as counselling);

3. is not influencing attitudes, beliefs or behaviour by means of persuading, leading or convincing, no matter how indirectly, subtly or painlessly;

4. is not the influencing of behaviour by admonishing, warning, threatening or compelling without the use of physical force or coercion (counselling is not discipline);

5. is not the selection and assignment of individuals for various jobs or activities (counselling is not personnel work even though the same tests may be used in both);

6. is not interviewing (while interviewing is involved it is not synonymous).

Having discussed the various aspects of generic counselling it may be useful now to consider some of the definitions of counselling that are describing psychological counselling.

Whilst Patterson (1967) lists his views of what counselling is not, Rogers (1942) (the "school of thought" most commonly used by the sample of counsellors in the present work) on the other hand offers a more positive approach in his definition:

"A definitely structured permissive relationship which allows the client to gain an understanding of himself to a degree which enables him to take new positive steps in the light of his new orientation".

A similar approach is offered by E.C. Lewis (1970):

"A process by which a troubled person is helped to feel and behave in a more personally satisfying manner through interaction with an uninvolved person (the counsellor) who provides information and reactions which stimulate the

client to develop behaviours which enable him to deal more effectively with himself and his environment".

Blocher (1966) provides a definition which also supports the philosophy that man can be responsible for his own behaviour. He is not just the product of his past but has the ability to control his behaviour by insight into his behaviour pattern. This definition states that "each individual has an opportunity to master the tasks that will equip him with the coping behaviour necessary for handling these roles and relationships that are involved in his next state of development".

Hughes (1971) sees counselling as "enabling people to examine their needs and problems and in so doing to reduce the confusion in their thoughts and feelings so that they may formulate workable plans for themselves".

Jones (1970) also regards counselling as an enabling process which "encourages self responsibility and helps people to make choices or decisions or to share an inner burden which is becoming too intolerable to bear alone".

Arbuckle (1965), like Patterson, also offers a definition of what counselling is not - "Counselling is not helping a person either to adjust to society or to fight it". Arbuckle also reinforces the view that counselling is "helping him to come to see who he really is, what he has and does not have, what he can do easily, what he can do with difficulty and what he probably cannot do at all...(It) is a close sharing of a human relationship with one who has no guarantees, no answers; one who can help him to see freedom, but freedom with risk; one who can help him to come to see that freedom and self-integrity are the same thing, that they are within the grasp of each of us and that we are the ones to determine whether we wishs to hold them tightly or let them fall".

Arbuckle (op.cit.) also echoes Rogers' (1951) phrase of "unconditional acceptance as a non directive counsellor". In contrast, another view of counselling held by a Behaviourist Counsellor, Krumboltz (1965) defines counselling somewhat broadly as "whatever ethical activities a counsellor undertakes in an effort to help the client engage in those types of behaviours which will lead to a resolution of the client's problems".

It would be useful to consider the meanings of counselling given by British educationalists.

Milner (1974) defines counselling as "to help an individual to make his own decisions and choices in the light of his feelings and needs". Milner (op.cit.) defines a counsellor as "one who uses interpersonal skills and understanding in a relationship to help a student to resolve those practical and personal difficulties which arise from his particular developmental problems".

Daws (1974) qualifies the meaning of counselling by particular reference to its meaning in educational settings: "The term counselling is not less subject to ambiguity. Many English texts still prefer to use it in a broad sense that includes all forms of verbal helping encounters. As teachers are fond of asserting, we <u>all</u> counsel .... Counselling is but one form of personal helping and is different from that offered by doctors, careers advisers, faculty deans, social workers, lodgings officers, wardens of halls and moral tutors, even though all of these people may wish to practise counselling from time to time, assuming they have a taste for it, and some skill. Counselling is thus a particular kind of expertise requiring certain insights and skills and practised within a framework of professional

principles governing the nature of the outcome sought and the relationship that obtains between the counsellor and his client. Obviously professional counsellors do many things to help their clients in education other than merely counsel".

Counselling is, therefore, a frequently used and frequently mis-used term. It refers to a method of helping people which has much in common with psychotherapy but which usually takes place in non-medical settings. The clients are usually "normal" and "healthy" although they may recognise that they have a problem.

There are also many different forms of counselling st emming from various schools of thought (for example Behavioural, Gestalt and Existential) and involving many different techniques but essentially based on a very fundamental human need.

Bolger (1978) discusses these human needs:

"People need close human contacts; 'love needs' is the term used by Marlow, Berne calls it 'recognition hunger' while 'human nourishment' is a term used by Carkhuff. Deprived of satisfying human relationships and the feeling of coping which grows from such relationships, children and adults may become unhappy, anxious, depressed or maladjusted. In the same way, people who have become disturbed by external circumstances, loss, frustration, uncertainty, for instance, may require satisfying relationships to enable them to cope with these circumstances. The counselling relationship is one very effective way of providing human nourishment to someone with a problem".

What, then, is meant by the "counselling relationship" in educational establishments? What are the misconceptions of counselling held by various personnel in colleges?

When I researched into the Misconceptions of Counselling in Further and Higher Education, I worked with four groups of people from 17 different educational establishments. Namely, not in order of importance, Directors of Polytechnics, 17 Principals of Colleges of FE, 600 Tutors of Further and Higher Education, Students from all disciplines and Counsellors, where they had been appointed. These groups were asked for their views on the role of a counsellor. The various comments of each of these groups of people are set out below:

1. Senior Management described counsellors as being (on the positive side) - a back-up to tutors; someone to support the student on the disciplinary committee; welfare officers; a mine of information; and someone to whom tutors can refer students in order that they can shirk their own responsibilities as a tutor. On the negative side, Senior Management described counsellors as subversive; an alternative to punishment; and someone who may help the student stir up trouble about their course.

2. Tutors described counsellors as being (on the positive side) - job finders; helpful; caring; one who oils the wheels; a liaison officer between departments; a way to get through the "red tape"; and a facilitator. On the negative side, tutors described counsellors as - unprofessional; someone not clever enough to teach; a tea drinker; unrealistic; and an outsider.

3. Students produced the following comments, for example (on the positive side) - counselling means having someone in a College who

can find jobs for you; counselling means having someone to turn to if you have any kind of problem; a non-judgemental person; having someone who is prepared to see your tutor and tell your side of the story; and a string-puller. On the negative side - being psycho-analysed; a headshrinker; someone who is a non-academic who cannot mix with the other staff.

4. Counsellors perceived themselves as - sensitive; a string-puller; a liaison officer throughout the College; a back-up person to the tutor; a good listener; an information officer; perceptive and analytical; and a humanising effect on the establishment.

Further discussions with counsellors in the pilot study also revealed another aspect of the meaning of counselling for their aims of counselling were obviously quite different from those held by other personnel in Colleges.

The aims given by counsellors were:

(i) to relieve emotional distress;
(ii) to help explore feelings;
(iii) to help a person rediscover his true self and his real needs;
(iv) to help acceptance of self;
(v) to possibly establish goals and make decisions;
(vi) to increase clarification of needs.

Therefore counselling not only means different things to different people in different settings but also means different things to different people in the same settings. Furthermore, counselling means different things to the same people in the same setting!

The confusions and misconceptions in counselling are, therefore, many, especially in educational settings.

1. The dialogue between tutors as to the significance of "academic counselling" as opposed to "personal counselling".

2. The quality of "anomie" and "alienation" in the student experience and whether this makes any significant difference to the types of problem encountered by students or rather whether tutors are presented with problems that differ in phenomena depending on whether students are living away from home or living at home.

3. The question of credibility of counselling as a specific skill.

As stated previously, one of the major misconceptions appears to be the confusion between generic counselling and psychological counselling. The controversial area of counselling has been an on-going debate in educational establishments for the past decade.

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Further Publications by the Author

Academic Counselling, a FESC Publication.
Preventive Counselling in F.E., (FESC).
Misconceptions of Counselling, (FESC).
Pitfalls in Counselling (in FEU publication 1982 entitled "Tutoring").

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